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## Video Sketches as a Means of Introducing Blended Learning Approach in Teaching Foreign Languages at Technical Universities

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Abstract: The topicality of the article is determined by the widespread use of blended learning approaches in higher education, especially in studying foreign languages. With the limited number of classroom hours proposed for teaching foreign languages at technical universities, it became very relevant to introduce various alternative out-of-class monitoring methods. The aim of the research is to investigate the effectiveness of introducing video sketches as the way to improve the process of foreign language studying at technical universities. The authors assume that recording video monologues could facilitate students' speaking abilities, reduce the level of their anxiety compared to delivering monologues in class and could stimulate the effective use of classroom hours for teaching foreign languages. To prove this hypothesis the authors of the study conducted an experiment in Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University during the autumn term of 2019-2020 academic year with the total number of 232 participants randomly chosen from 1-course students of technical specialties with different levels of English language proficiency. The possibility to record a monologue instead of delivering it face-to-face was considered as the IV (independent variable) of the experiment. Such research method as an open-close questionnaire was used afterwards to identify the students' satisfaction with the proposed alternative as well as the analysis of the exam results at the end of the course. These results as the part of the students' academic performance represented the DV (dependent variable) of the experiment. The obtained data showed that students of the experimental group passed their exam significantly better than the students of the control group. Thus, the present survey proved that students of the experimental group would prefer to record video sketches instead of delivering monologues face to face and that making video monologues improved their fluency and helped overcome some psychological barriers. On the basis of the research and the results obtained during the experiment, the authors conclude that the application of video monologues in the process of teaching foreign languages is highly promising.

**Keywords**: university education, information technologies, blended learning, out-of-class monitoring.

#### Introduction

In the modern system of teaching a foreign language at the university, the tendency to use various means of information and communication technologies is becoming extremely relevant (Porozovs, Dudkina, Valdemiers, 2019). As the system of higher education has developed, the use of computer and Internet technologies seems to be highly promising, as it allows teachers to modernize the learning process, increase students' motivation, and consequently use classroom hours for foreign language studying more productively.

During the studying process, the transition to a blended learning system is carried out using a variety of Internet technologies, involving all kinds of online courses and various extracurricular forms of control. At the same time, it is necessary to maintain interaction between a teacher and students, introducing a learner-centred approach in teaching a foreign language.

This article describes one of the forms of control within a learner-centred approach using information and communication technologies (video sketch) and substantiates the relevance of its use in foreign language teaching in a technical university. Thus, the main tasks are to introduce a video monologue as a way to overcome these psychological barriers and implement the ideas of out-of-class monitoring and blended learning in studying foreign languages. The basic interest of the present research is highlighted by the experiment organized in St. Petersburg Polytechnic University of Peter the Great to compare face-to-face presentation of a monologue in video format with recorded monologues (video sketches) and to verify the effectiveness of the letter based on the students' progress results and their reviews and comments.

#### **Blended Learning**

Blended learning is considered to be one of the most fast-growing major tendencies (Garrison, Kanuka, 2004; Wright, 2017; Huang, 2019) and is described as "the single greatest unrecognized trend in higher education today" (Young, 2002, 2). Many researchers admit that blended learning has already become "common place educational strategy in higher education" (Gikandi, Morrow, Davis, 2011, 2333) and would become 'inevitable step for all universities' (Garrison, Kanuka, 2004, 104). One of the first scientific definitions of 'blended learning' was proposed by C.R. Graham: 'Blended learning is the combination of traditional face-to-face and technology-mediated instruction' (Graham, Woodfield, Harrison, 2013, 4). D.R. Garrison also defined blended learning as 'the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences' (Garrison, Kanuka, 2004, 96).

The authors of the present article prefer to apply the term 'blended learning' to indicate that there is a mixture of traditional face-to-face or in-class lessons and an online format of fulfilling home assignments as out-of-class monitoring. Whereas some researchers estimate that via blended learning approach '30–80 % of learning/teaching activities are conducted through web-based ICT' (Gikandi, Morrow, Davis, 2011, 2336), the present article refers blended learning as a digitally enhanced type of control, while mostly studying process is accomplished in a traditional format. In addition, according to the statistics obtained in St. Petersburg Polytechnic University in 2019 more that 50 % of undergraduate and graduate students were engaged in e-learning (Bylieva et al., 2019).

Turning to the benefits of the blended learning approach the authors can state that it generally 'harnesses both face-to-face learning and online learning' (Friesen, Lowe, 2012, 375). Nowadays researchers distinguish such advantages of applying blended learning practices in the universities as: the increase of student's motivation; the ability to monitor individual student's path; the ability of self-monitoring and the rise of self-regulation and self-realization (Abakumova, Ivanova, Polyakova, 2019; Odinokaya et al., 2019a; Odinokaya et al., 2019b).

The authors of the article studied a range of scientific works dedicated to the students' attitude to blended learning approach (Wright, 2017; Baranova et al., 2019) and the authors can assume that students' perception and their positive emotions are of crucial importance. Most researchers find that students have greater level of satisfaction with blended approaches compared with both face-to-face and online formats (Owston, York, Murtha, 2013). R. Owston suggests that along with the ability of higher level of autonomy in regulating their learning, students still have the opportunity to develop a strong learning community and promote close associations with each other. The experiments showed that the use of blended learning has a positive effect improving exam marks, therefore, the authors of the present study decided to organize an experiment during the autumn term which ends with the exam on the Basic course of English as a foreign language and compare the results afterwards. Furthermore, the use of ICT could improve self-regulation 'as a necessary pedagogical condition for the successful professional self-realization of students' (Odinokaya et al., 2019b, 150).

For the recent 5 years the topic of blended learning in higher education is still on the rise. Special importance of the present study is connected with researches dedicated to the use of blended learning in teaching English as a foreign language especially in technical universities (Almazova, Andreeva, Khalyapina, 2018; Sumtsova et al., 2016). The researchers discuss such basic problem as the 'lack of academic hours allocated for learning foreign languages in technical higher schools' (Sumtsova et al., 2016, 335). However, there is a lack of researches about blended learning approach concerning the use of ICT as a form of control or out-of-class monitoring such as video sketches or monologues, thus this topic should undergo further investigation.

### Monologue

The monological skills formation is regarded as a basic activity in foreign languages learning at the technical university. Being an intermediary between productive activities such as writing and spontaneous speech it forms the fundamental skills that will lead to the further effective nonprepared utterance (Pérez-Llantada, 2003). The success of the monologue and skill formation is determined by detailed instructions (Lee, Muldner, 2020).

The use of video techniques has a set of beneficial features both for students and teachers. First of all, this approach makes a student be more focused on the content and structure of a monologue (Frobenius, 2011). In this case, the student can only rely on his own efforts and, therefore, the students improve the ability to be responsible for the results of their work and the desire to make it more qualitative. The process of forming skills is accompanied by students' cognitive activity intensification (Holubnycha, 2016). As a whole, students' motivation to learn a foreign language is growing (Ivanova, Ivanov, 2016).

In addition to the fact that students are more attentive to the contents of the monologue, they also become more responsible for the grammatical, lexical and pronunciation components of the speech, the quality of the presentation has been improving. Furthermore, students have the opportunity to make several records of their video sketch if they notice any errors in their speech. Thus, the possibility of self-monitoring, self-checking and self-assessment is possible (Rich, Hannafin, 2009; McDonald, 2010; Odinokaya et al., 2019a). The problem of self-control seems to be very relevant and significant in the process of teaching foreign languages. According to authors' ideas, the ability to evaluate yourself, to determine your own shortcomings and correct them, which could be done while watching your own video monologues, helps students to achieve a higher level of development of self-learning competency, without which educational activity is unthinkable today.

The ability to re-record a video sketch helps students to withstand some psychological difficulties that may arise when a student presents his monologue directly to the teacher. There is a category of students who are afraid of making mistakes, afraid of failure or experience severe stress and, therefore, they deliver the oral speech much worse than they could have done it in a more relaxed atmosphere. Recording a monologue at home, understanding that in the case of a failure they can re-record it, students, if they wish, can achieve an ideal variant from their point of view. This way a teacher can help such students overcome possible psychological barriers (Ahmad, Shaharim, Abdullah, 2017; Hall, Walsh, 2002).

Provided that the student records a series of video monologues on various topics covered during the term, you can clearly trace the student's progress, thereby motivating him for further development and success. Finally, the use of video sketches in teaching foreign languages helps to implement a learner-centred approach in teaching (Roter et al., 2004). A learner-centred approach implies such an organization of the studying process according to which the choice of methods, forms, techniques and teaching aids is carried out considering the individual characteristics of the students. The teacher may pay more attention to this version of a monologue, he can re-watch some passages that he could not immediately understand which is impossible to do when a student presents a monologue 'face to face' (Odinokaya et al., 2020). The teacher has the opportunity to write a report on a particular video sketch and send it to the student individually. The student, in turn, can also be more responsible about his mistakes to avoid them in the future.

Despite the undeniable advantages of using a video sketch as a form of control, there are some difficulties that a teacher may face (Kemp et al., 2014). First of all, these are technical constraints. Students do not always have the possibility to record their monologue; therefore, this form of control should not be positioned as a mandatory one. The student should always be given a choice of how he can present his speech - in the traditional face-to-face format or in the form of a video sketch. It could be noted that this approach in presenting a monologue should be considered as a supplementary tool in the educational process. It is important to maintain a lively dialogue between students and the teacher in the foreign language classes, as well as to develop the ability to deliver a speech in front of a large audience. The use of video sketches enables the teacher to take on a new role, but it should not replace the live communication that occurs during classroom hours.

### Video sketches as a way to overcome psychological barriers and reduce foreign language anxiety.

The psychological barrier is defined as everything that hinders, restrains, and eventually reduces the effectiveness of studying and personal development (Ivanova, Burakova, Tokareva, 2020, 151). This barrier is not only a particular state of the psyche, expressed by disability to assess and control emotions as well as mental processes. It is also a pedagogical phenomenon, arising while solving educational tasks and overcoming these barriers as a part of a task can be viewed as a means of developing the student's personality. Psychological barriers as a whole are generally referred to as 'foreign language

anxiety' in various resources. Researchers distinguish different types of FLA such as 'fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and negative attitudes toward English language class' (Alrabai, 2015, 163) and many others, but in the case of the present study the most relevant one is communicative anxiety. This type of anxiety is mostly associated with oral performance and 'oral class activities' (De Saint Léger, Storch, 2009). Mostly researchers admit that in this case the level of anxiety depends on various factors, with 'self-confidence in speaking English, gender and proficiency playing an important role in classroom performance' (Matsuda, Gobel, 2004, 21). As speaking brings anxiety, and its level rises in stressful situations such as speaking in front of the class, authors consider that recording video sketches with monologues could help students avoid such stressful situations and reduce the level of anxiety. The authors hope that the implementation of video sketches in foreign language teaching will help reduce the level of foreign language anxiety as much as possible.

Thus, the aim of the research is to investigate the effectiveness of video sketches in improving the process of foreign language studying at technical universities as a means of out-of-class monitoring and blended learning approach.

### Methodology

The aim is achieved by the following objectives: - through conducting a research experiment comparing the results obtained by control and experimental groups; - through organizing a questionnaire exploring the level of students' satisfaction with the proposed monitoring approach and studying the impact of applying video sketches on students' level of anxiety.

The authors of the present research put forward a hypothesis that recording video sketches could overall improve the level of students' English language mastery, especially their speaking abilities. Moreover, there arise such research questions as: - whether the application of video monologues could rationalize the use of classroom hours for this type of out-of-class monitoring; if this could reduce the level of anxiety, which some of the students suffer from when delivering a monologue face-to-face or speaking in public; - whether it could create closer teacher-to-student cooperation and give rise to intrinsic motivation for studying foreign languages.

### Data and Participants

To verify the effectiveness of using video monologues as a form of monitoring the students' success in studying the material, control and experimental groups were selected during the autumn semester (September–December 2019). Both groups with the total number of 232 participants consisted of 1-course students of technical specialties (civil and mechanical engineering departments), approximately of the same age (18-19 year-olds). The authors didn't specifically choose the groups for the experiment – these were ordinary groups that were present at the time-table term, thus they were from different regions of the Russian Federation, mostly boys (73%), because of their specialties, and had different levels of knowledge of English.

### **Materials and Instruments**

During the autumn term according to the program of the course 'The Basic Course, English' the students were to study four modules and prepare monologues for each module; thus, the group of authors from St. Petersburg Polytechnic University prepared the corresponding schemes for every monologue in the form of a table. The results of these efforts have been published earlier (Odinokaya et al., 2019b) and the present article used these findings as the most relevant ones.

To meet the vocabulary requirements and to get maximum scores for cohesion the students were also provided with the list of Basic Vocabulary for every monologue and the list of linking words which could be used in any monologue. According to the proposed criteria students had to use more than 75 % of the basic vocabulary (the use of advanced vocabulary and collocations was highly recommended as well) and not less than 10 different linking words for the best result.

### Procedure

In the control group (with the number of 120 students), the students were proposed to prepare a monologue within the traditional face-to-face approach – to answer a monologue directly to the

teacher. Unfortunately, the students had to find the possibility to deliver their speech, since it was not possible to interview each student (120 students in the group) during the lesson. In accordance with the program, during the semester the contents of 4 modules of the textbook must be covered and a monologue must be prepared after each unit -4 monologues, respectively.

Each monologue was evaluated at a maximum of 10 points, and students got a credit as the arithmetic mean of all four monologues altogether. As an alternative, students were asked to answer a monologue at the credit-lesson – students were supposed to prepare all four monologues for the credit, but would answer only one of them at random basis. It should be noted that the vast majority of students in the control group decided to present all monologues during the term, and only two of them decided to wait for the test lesson.

The experimental group consisted of 112 students, and they were given the opportunity to make video recordings of their monologues. The criteria for evaluating the monologues were similar in both groups. In the experimental group, students had the choice whether to make a video, to deliver a speech face-to-face to the teacher or as a credit at the last lesson. As a result, out of the total number of students, 96 students (86 %) decided to take the opportunity of sending video monologues, 8 students (7 %) decided to answer it to the teacher and the other 8 (7 %) left it for the test lesson.

The control group (with the number of 120 students), was proposed to prepare a monologue within the traditional face-to-face approach - to deliver a monologue directly to the teacher.

### **Results and Discussions**

At the end of the semester, the authors conducted a questionnaire in the experimental group to determine how the students evaluate the effectiveness of video monologues in the process of learning a foreign language. In total, 112 questionnaires were received, and the following basic conclusions can be drawn based on their analysis (Figure 1).

All 112 questionnaires (A - 100 %) indicate that the video monologue recording helps students to increase the level of foreign language acquisition in general and to improve their speaking skills in particular. All 112 students (B - 100 %) noted that video monologues should be applied within the framework of a modern university, while two of the questioned students noted that this form of control should be carried out exclusively on a voluntary basis.

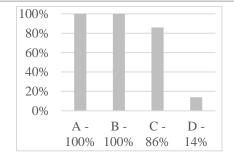


Figure 1. Evaluation of the effectiveness of video monologues in the process of learning a foreign language.

Of the total number of questionnaires, 96 students (C - 86 %) admitted that they preferred to make a video of the monologue, instead of answering it directly to the teacher and described this experience as a positive one, and only 16 of them (D - 14 %) answered that they would prefer face-to-face communication with the teacher. As for the reasons, they indicated: that they feel extremely embarrassed and uncomfortable while making a record; that their unsuccessful record will exist somewhere and disappoint the teacher; as well as the lack of free time to record a successful attempt.

The questionnaire contained a request to explain the reasons why, in students' opinion, the teacher

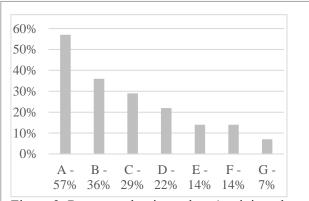


Figure 2. Reasons why, in students' opinion, the teacher applies this type of control in practice.

applies this type of control in practice (Figure 2). The most frequent answers to this question were: - since it is more convenient to record and evaluate a monologue, both from the teacher's and student's point of view (A - 57 %); - due to the fact that it is not possible to interview each student during the lesson, thus, to save time for the classroom activities (B - 36 %); - To stimulate the development of students' speaking skills

(C - 29%); - to enable students to look at themselves from the different side, thereby stimulating the improvement of self-control (D - 22%); - to implement an individual approach to each student (E - 14%); - since this way it is easier for a teacher to assess the level of students' commitment (F - 14%); - to help students overcome the language barrier (G - 7%).

Students were also proposed to note the positive aspects of the video monologue recording that were important for them (Figure 3).

Based on the results of an open survey, the following answers were received: the possibility to make a different record of a failure attempt (A - 57%); the possibility to record a video at any convenient time and at any place (B - 36%); the possibility of self-control, analysis of their own mistakes (C - 36%); the development of speaking skills (D - 36%); less stress and anxiety compared to the traditional form of control (E - 29%); the opportunity to look at yourself from the outside and assess your level of a foreign language (F - 29%); the ability to prepare better for the recording of a video monologue (G - 14%); a greater desire to improve, to make their records better with

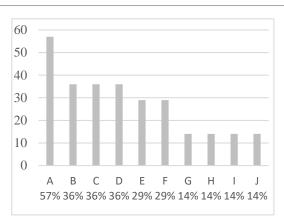


Figure 3. Positive aspects of recording a video monologue in students' opinion.

every new attempt (H - 14 %); improving the quality of understanding of the studied material, in particular key vocabulary from the module (I - 14 %); the fact that vocabulary is extending as a whole (J - 14 %).

One of the most important points of the survey that should be considered are the problems that students faced during the recording of their monologues, since it is important to improve the application of video monologues as a form of control and try to overcome the possible difficulties (Figure 4).

As the most significant problems, the authors list: the inability to stay alone and to find a suitable place for video recording, as neighbours and surrounding people might interfere and interrupt you (A - 21 %); it is difficult to behave naturally in front of the camera, it is difficult to show emotions (B - 21 %); a great temptation to "cheat" using the notes (C - 14 %); it is unpleasant to look at yourself on a record (D - 14 %).

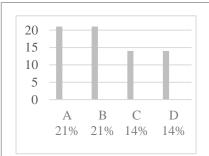


Figure 4. The problems students faced during the recording of their monologues.

After the experiment was over, the authors got the results of the exam, which both groups had to pass at the end of the academic year in summer 2020. The curriculum suggests that the exam for the Basic Course of English should consist of two parts: a monologue on one of the topics that students had been provided with in advance and retelling or summarizing of an article. Nevertheless, because of the COVID pandemic the whole educational process including the exams was carried out in the distance format and it was decided to change the programme according to the circumstances and to include only a monologue in the exam. As the exam was assessed within the 5-band criteria, the students could get the following scores for the monologue: 2 - as 'unsatisfactory', 3 - for 'satisfactory', 4 - for 'fairly good' and 5 - for 'excellent'.

As it can be seen from the Table 1, the students from the experimental group passed the exam significantly better than the students from the control group: the percentage of students who got 'excellent' mark in the experimental group is 21 % higher than those of the control group, and the distinction between the percentages of the students who got 'satisfactory' mark reaches 16 %. Overall, it can be seen that the percentage of the students who got a mark higher than 'satisfactory' is 93 % in the experimental group compared to 77 % in the control group. These data show that applying video monologues as the means of out-of-class monitoring could help students to get prepared for the exam better and there is a clear connection between general satisfaction with the course and the students' progress. The authors believe that this type of control will stimulate the speaking abilities of the students and foster their language proficiency in general.

Table 1

# The Results of the Exam for General Course of English

Band	The Control Group	The Experimental Group
'2' – 'Unsatisfactory	0 (none) out of 120 (0 %)	0 (none) out of 112 (0 %)
'3' - 'Satisfactory'	28 out of 120 (23 %)	8 out of 112 (7 %)
'4' – 'Good'	36 out of 120 (30 %)	28 out of 112 (25 %)
'5' - 'Excellent'	64 out of 120 (47 %)	76 out of 112 (68 %)

Besides the fact that these results based on our conducted research proved the effectiveness of the experiment, carried out at St. Petersburg Polytechnic University of Peter the Great during the standard academic term, it is worth mentioning that the recent COVID pandemic showed us that the application of video monologues could be especially useful in the conditions of totally online education when face-to-face presentation of a monologue becomes impossible. The data obtained from the experiment showed that this is a very promising alternative to the traditional way to present a monologue: the participants (1-course students of civil and mechanical engineering departments) expressed their positive attitude to video monologue recording, admitted the rise of their motivation to study a foreign language, and overall, the results of the research proved to be significant and showed that our hypothesis was correct. The authors hope that their experience could be helpful in any educational institution under any circumstances.

### **Conclusions**

The main idea and topicality of the present research was to prove that recording video sketches with monologues as a form of out-of-class monitoring could facilitate the studying process of teaching English as a foreign language in non-linguistic universities. The basic problem of teaching foreign languages in technical universities nowadays is the lack of working hours for this discipline as well as the lack of intrinsic motivation of the students of technical specialties.

Despite the mentioned difficulties, considering the positive experience of applying video monologues as a form of control using information and communication technologies in the author's pedagogical practice, the authors can make a conclusion that this method ultimately helps to get students interested, increase their motivation, and engage them in the creative process, and thus make the process of teaching a foreign language more successful.

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